

Grant Evaluation Requires Stewardship

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Stewardship is not a question of size. Whether the factor is the size of the grant or the size of the foundation, one of the major facets of Stewardship is evaluation.

Foundations are under an ethical obligation to ascertain that charitable dollars are used appropriately and effectively. This involves two types of targets.

First is the summative evaluation, which attempts to ascertain if the grant's objective(s) have been achieved, as indicated in the application.

The second is a formative evaluation, which is more interactive and complex. It is really a process of evaluating and assessing the progress of the grant as it is implemented. It may modify the objectives, activities or participants, etc., as the reality of the implementation environment dictates.

These two types of evaluations may be used to evaluate a specific grant or a specific area of a Foundation's grant making program. Today's evaluation literature has a wide variety of "new" names (terminology) for these evaluation constraints. However, evaluation may be thought of as a matrix, from the simplest, i.e., Summative/Specific Grant to Formulative/Grant making Programs, and the resulting combinations.

Small foundations, at most, often carry out the most rudimentary "summative evaluations" for specific grants, requesting the recipient to prepare a report on the grants achievements, etc. Rarely are such reports meaningful or even accurate.

Strategies must be implemented which will allow small foundations the resources necessary to carry out evaluations at all levels mentioned above. In most cases, there are several simple strategies which can be utilized to bring effective evaluation into the grant making process:

1. Have your grant request forms emphasize and require an evaluation design based on outcomes;

2. Identify which type of grants/programs require simple summative evaluation and which require more complex formative evaluation. For example, equipment grants may only require verification of purchases and use, whereas service grants may require both formative and summative evaluation designs, with the active aid of the Foundation in development of the design.

3. Find the right resource people to help with the evaluations. There are numerous places to look for these people. Try universities with graduate students who may be able to utilize the evaluation as part of their required research. Attend professional meetings of personnel who implement the functions you fund. For example, in health, the American Public Association annual meeting. You will find really committed professionals, especially nurses, teachers, and social workers who are more than willing to be "evaluation consultants" for a modest fee or even without compensation.

Do not forget your own field. Ask your fellow grant makers if they will evaluate a project for you. Often they are happy to do so for a variety of reasons, including learning about another agency.

Perhaps our Association of Small Foundations can develop an on-line file of colleagues, by specialty and geographic area, who are willing to be evaluation consultants - or develop a list of professionals who are willing to volunteer or, for a small fee, conduct project/program evaluations.